

# Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

## Strange Animals of Years Ago Described to Walt McDougall by a Black Forest Elf Hun- dreds of Years Old

SO FAR as I have been able to learn nobody knows why it is that shoemakers have always been the ones to see fairies, brownies and elves and have all sorts of wonderful adventures.

Why should an elf feel like showing himself to a cobbler? I should think that the little people would feel as safe talking to an artist or a doctor, but I have never yet met either a doctor or an artist who ever had the pleasure of seeing an elf, to say nothing of having a talk with one. But I know at least five cobbler who claim to have often met and spoken to pixies, brownies, elves and gnomes.

As all but one of these are German shoemakers, I imagine that Germans are favored by the small folk, but I am not so certain of it.

Conrad Schmoltzbechtel, one of these cobbler, informed me that it was probably because shoemakers are very learned and wise men, who constantly studied as they worked.

"Shoemakers," said he, "are the ones who first invented canary birds, or at least trained them to sing tunes; they were the first to color meerschaum pipes, to take small puppies and tie them not far from a nice tempting bone so that they would stretch and strain and pull until they grew long in the body and short in the legs and became those funny little dachshunds."

A cobbler, he tells me, first invented frankfurter sausages and wire mousetraps, but I doubt this.

At any rate, Conrad is a good deal of a humbug and is not really as smart as he pretends to be, for when I asked him if he could half-sole a pair of snow-shoes he said he thought he could, but wasn't sure. But he had seen and talked to several elves, according to his own story, and he had witnessed a fairy dance in a mooning more than once, so he said.

All this talk about the little people made me exceedingly curious, and anxious, also, to witness some of the marvels he talked about. At last, after he had declared again and again that it was simply impossible to obtain a view of an elf unless you were a cobbler, I unfolded my plan to him. It was simply to take his little shop and sit there day after day and night after night until at last the elves, convinced that I was a real shoemaker, would pay me a social visit and let me into their games.

"Ach der Lui!" exclaimed Conrad. "Vat it iss! 'You tink dot you can a shoemaker been alretty mitout learning dot peesness yet? Dey firt out right away oncet dot you can't did it, shoost as soon as dey see you! Dey ain't no fools!"

"But before they get around I will have learned a lot about shoemaking," said I.

"Ach! Dot takes ears ant years to learn dot peesness. It iss not shoost to hammer away on a piece of ledder all de time. You tink because you can scratch away on a piece of paper dot you can do anything alretty. Dot's one big grand job dot shoemaker yet."

Well, at last I persuaded him to take a vacation and go away to my bungalow down at Atlantic City and go fishing every day at his expense, and when this was proposed he was no longer proof against the temptation, for he dearly loved to go fishing, like all good men.

I packed him off on a Monday morning and hustled to take up my new occupation, for he had given me many a hint as to how to proceed in order to convince not only the elves but others that I was a genuine cobbler.

Well, a week went by and no elves appeared. To be sure, I was quite certain that, more than once, I had heard mysterious noises and faint whispering behind my back, down among the great rolls of calfskin in the corner of the shop, but I had seen nothing, and when I heard these slight sounds I was very careful never to look around, for I was certain that any sudden motion or the betrayal of curiosity would frighten my timid visitors away.

They were getting acquainted with the new cobbler in their own way, and, I thought, were studying my habits and manner of working before they revealed themselves, so I never let them suspect that I was listening or watching at all.

Sometimes, just as Conrad used to do when he was very busy, I would work far into the night, long after all the townspeople were sound asleep, and then it was that I used most frequently to hear the tiny footsteps patter across the boards, and one night when engaged most earnestly in my toil, for I really had become quite interested in the work, I suddenly thought of the story in Grimm's Fairy Tales where the cobbler and his wise wife made the elves a pair of shoes and some clothes.

"Why not make the same experiment?" I asked myself. "Perhaps it might induce the elves to show themselves at once and be very friendly."

Instantly I began to seek for some material to carry out the plan, and in a closet I soon found some delicate red kid that I was sure would make fine shoes. Then I thought it would be better to wait until next day when they would not be present, so I went home at once.

Early next morning I went to the shop, and getting down on my knees carefully examined the floor, where the dust lay thick, and soon I discovered tiny footprints there, which alone was proof of the presence of elves, for none were more than an inch in length.

Carefully measuring the largest footprint, I soon had a pattern to work after, and I began briskly cutting out the soles of thin leather and shaping the upper parts of the scarlet kid. It was a very delicate job, you may be sure, and I spoiled the first pair by my lack of skill, as well as my haste; but beginning again more carefully I soon had the satisfaction of seeing them shape themselves very fairly, indeed.

All day long I stitched the tiny footwear, sewing so carefully that even the oldest shoemaker would not have been ashamed of the work, and when night came they were completed—as pretty a pair of elf-shoes as any one could desire. Tiny cords with tasseled ends were the shoe-laces; red, of course, to match the shoes, and really I was quite puffed up with pride when I surveyed my handiwork.

For a long time I pondered over different ways of presenting the gift to my elfin visitors, but at



WITH FRIGHTENED CRIES THE ELVES JUMPED DOWN AND FLED

last I decided to place them in the foot-prints which I had measured, so that the little folk would instantly see to whom they belonged.

Then I put out my light and went home in great glee.

The next morning, much earlier than usual, I hastened to the shop. The shoes had disappeared! Nothing showed who had taken them, but the tell-tale footprints in the dust betrayed everything. An elf had carried away my gift, but he had left nothing to show whether he was pleased or not.

All day long I pegged, soled and heeled and pondered, but when night came I had about arrived at a conclusion that I had wasted my time and that the elves had no desire to make my acquaintance.

I would have gone home had not a little boy entered and asked me to mend his shoes that night so that he could wear them to school next day, and, of course, I was compelled to serve him for that was what I had promised Conrad. So after supper, when I was busily stitching away and whistling in the regular shoemaker style, and almost everybody else in town was fast asleep, I heard behind me the tap, tap of tiny heels, and when I suddenly turned I saw a little figure not quite as tall as my bench.

He was an elf. Exactly like the pictures in the story books, with a red, rosy face, a long white beard and dressed in a rough gray jacket with a hood to cover his head, turned back on his broad shoulders. He wore tiny red shoes on his feet, and I saw at once that they fitted him perfectly, and I smiled down at him very pleasantly.

He seemed somewhat timid, standing just like a boy ready to dart away, but when I smiled he seemed assured of my friendly intentions and came nearer to me. I waited for him to speak first, and when he spoke to me in German it did not surprise me to find German elves in a German cobbler's shop. He said:

"I thank you, strange cobbler, for the beautiful shoes. Never had an elf such splendid footwear, and I am very proud of them."

I replied in German: "I am glad they please you. I wished to show you that I was friendly toward you and your folk."

"How did you know there were elves here?" he asked.

"I have read many books of magic lore, and I have knowledge of your people," I replied. "I have long known you were here, but I did not wish to trouble you."

"Well, well! What a fuss they made about it! They have all lived here for a long time, but were so afraid of you that they sent clear to the Black Forest, in Germany, for me to come and take a look at you; and, behold, the first thing I got a pair of shoes, and they never got anything all the time they've lived here. Ha, ha, ha! Such calf-heads that they are. Such dumb noodles, yes! Anybody could see with one look at you that you are a nice fellow and smart, too."

"Can you not speak English?" I asked.

"No, I have never been away from home before, and I would not have come only they said grandfather was the only one who could tell them what to do. They were all for going away from here when Conrad departed. Ach! They are American dumb-heads, all! Even now they are hiding in the wall, listening to us talking, and will you believe me, some of them can speak no German, yet it is only about two hundred years since their fathers came here. Such a nonsense!"

"Two hundred years! Is it possible? So long a time?" I exclaimed.

"Ach! That's nothing! Mere babies! I am three thousand years old myself, and I am still hale and hearty!"

"And have you lived all that time there in Germany and seen all the changes? Seen the land turn from dark woodlands into the great, rich cities, the people grow from wild, hairy savages to gentle scholars; seen great castles with their robber barons fall into decay, grand cathedrals rise and crumble, druids, Goths, Franks, Huns, Teutons, rise and flourish and fade away?"

"Ach! I have seen nothing," he interrupted. "I have always lived in the rocks in Black Forest, and never bothered about all these changes. I have noticed that they wore different clothes from time to time, but I still stick to what I wore when a boy. What to me are their wars and fashions? All humbug! Down in the earth we dig our gold and pile it up, and worry not about the fool people above us building castles, cathedrals, monuments, that all crumble like wax. Gold alone; yes, and silver, too, to last for all time."

"But in all this time you must have learned something," I cried. "You don't mean to tell me that you have been moulding away down below for two thousand years and know nothing about all the wonderful things that have happened?"

"Ach! I am not so green as I look, or as you imagine. Only the other day—well, yes; it's about three or four hundred years ago, I can't say exactly—I was acquainted, well acquainted, too, with a great philosopher and magician, the wizard Albertus Magnus, who actually wrote a book, all with his own hand."

"I saw him writing, and unless I had seen it I would not have said it; but he did it and it was magnificent. The book weighed twelve pounds. All in great black letters, made with a goose quill as if by magic, it was, and with beautiful colored pictures at the head of every page. Fine! Oh, the brave pictures! All of wonderful animals that roam the earth, all of which the great Magnus told me he had seen with his own eyes, and some of them were terrible to look upon. Such fearful forms and such awful faces it is not permitted common men to see, nor even elves, I think, for I have never yet met one who has seen any of the creatures. Albertus Magnus pictured, in faith, if I saw one even afar off I would fall down stiff with fear, so awful are they."

"It seems to me that I have heard of that wizard," said I, "and also of his book of animals, but I cannot remember what they were. I am pretty good on woody animals myself, and I would like to hear about them."

"No, indeed; they are too dreadful to talk about," cried my elf (whose name, by the way, is Aldrovandus Gesner), "I shudder when I think of them."

"Were they any worse than the flap-tailed Pandjundrum?" I inquired, seductively. "The animal with a tail like a snow-shovel and a neck ninety-nine feet long, with warts and bristles on it and an electric light on the ends of his horns? I guess not."

"Of such an awful thing I never heard, nor had Magnus, I think, for he certainly did not picture nor describe it, and I never heard of electric lights until I arrived here in America. Moonlight is our light," said Aldrovandus. "But Magnus wrote of the Lamia, which is a dread creature."

"You mean the Llama. Oh, they're common enough in South America, you know," said I, with some impatience, for I didn't wish to hear about such tame things.

"No, I mean the Lamia," he continued. "It is a wild beast," wrote the great philosopher, 'having several parts outwardly resembling an ox and inwardly a mule.'"

"How did he know what it was like inside?" I asked.

"He was a wizard," replied the elf. "The Lamia has a woman's face, very beautiful," he continued. "Also very large and comely shapes such as cannot be imitated by the art of any painter, having an excellent color in their fore parts, without wings, and no other voice but hissing like dragons; but they are the swiftest of foot of all earthly beasts, so none can escape them by running."

"Well, did he give you any more information about the wonders of the world?" I asked.

"Surely. He showed me the Sphinx. Ah, it was marvelous! 'A kind of Ape,' wrote he, 'having his body rough like Apes, the upper part like a woman and their visage much like them. Their voice very like a man's, but not articulate, sounding as if one did speak lastly or with sorrow. Their hair brown or swarthy color. They are bred in India or

Ethiopia. The true Sphinx is of a fierce though tameable nature, and if a man do first of all perceive or discern one of them before the beast discern the man he shall be safe, but if the beast first discern the man then it is mortal to the man."

"I am very glad that all of these fierce things have vanished," said I, "for it certainly wouldn't be safe anywhere if they existed now."

"Oh, I don't think they have vanished," replied the elf. "I guess they're around somewhere."

"Why, he might as well tell us that rabbits, prairie-dogs, or beavers were dangerous creatures," said I.

"Indeed, I well remember what he wrote about the last animal, the wondrous beaver. He said 'the Beaver is a most strong creature to bite, he will never let go his teeth that meet before he makes the bones crack. His hinder feet are like a Goose's and his forefeet like an Ape's. His fat tail is covered with a scaly skin, and he uses it for a rudder when he pursues fish. He comes forth of his holes in the night, and biting off boughs of Trees above the Rivers he makes him houses with an upper loft. When they are cut asunder they are delightful to see, for one lies on his back and bath the boughs between his legs and others draw him by the tail to their cottage.'"

"He was great on apes, wasn't he? Everything seemed to have an ape-like appearance," I suggested. "Had the wizard ever seen a real ape or monkey?"

"He wrote about the Cynocephales," replied my tiny friend. "They are a kind of Ape," said the magician, 'apes whose heads are like Dogges and their other parts like a Man's. Some there be which are able to write and naturally to discern letters, which kind the priests bring into their Temples, and at their first entrance the Priest bringeth him a writing Table, a pencil and Inke, so that by seeing him write he may make by all whether he be of the right kind, and the beast quickly showeth his skill. The Nomades, people of Ethiopia and the nations of Mentimori, live upon the milk of Cynocephales, keeping great herds of them and killing all the males.'"

"That's all about apes, I hope," said I. "Somebody must have been filling the old stick-in-the-mud philosopher with all sorts of funny stories. I suppose a sailor got his ear and made him believe everything he told him. There is hardly one word that is true in all you have repeated to me, in spite of the colored pictures."

Aldrovandus gazed at me reproachfully, and then added:

"Do you mean to say he was wrong about the fearful Mantichora?"

"I will say that there never was an animal by that name, so he was certainly wrong, indeed," I answered, with much heat.

"Almost every one of them had a man's face, as I remember," said the elf. "It made them very horrid."

"I should think so," said I, shuddering, "but that proves they were merely inventions, for no animal, except the humble monkey, has a face like a man. Of course there are big monkeys, apes and gorillas, but they have not the other marvelous characteristics which the philosopher gave his animals. I have at home, fastened against the wall, a creature that for truly ferocious looks would make them all seem very tame, indeed. It is called a sea-spider, and is merely a crab, but it looks dreadful."

"I should much like to see that," said the elf.

"Then come with me," said I, "and you will see it. I suppose that, as it is quite a distance to my home, I might invite you to sit in my coat pocket and take a ride."

"I shall be pleased," responded my friend, "but I must tell my people that I am going with you, or else they will be alarmed."

He went away into the gloom that shrouded the far end of the shop and vanished. I heard whispering and faint exclamations proceeding from the darkness, and soon he returned with two others,

## But He Laughs at the Descriptions and Tells His Strange Visitor That While it is Very Interesting it is Not True

who were much younger in appearance, and one of them spoke, saying:

"Grandfather declares that he is going to your house. What are you about to do? We are afraid, for we do not know you."

"Your grandfather is in no danger, nor are you," I replied. "What do you suppose I would do? Do you think people wish to harm the elves?"

"We have always been taught to avoid mortals like yourself," began one of them, looking at me anxiously.

"Well, that teaching is just like the bugaboos in the book your grandfather has been telling about. All funny rot. We would be very glad to be acquainted with all the elves there are. I will show some modern matters to your grandfather and instruct him in some new things, that's all."

"May we go with you?" asked the other.

"Come along, as many of you as wish. The more the merrier."

So, with three elves instead of one in my overcoat pocket, I trudged home. When I turned on the electric light and helped them down to the floor they gazed about in wonder, for many queer things are to be found in my room.

There are stuffed birds and animals, sea-wonders, fossils, plaster-casts, horned toads, lizards, Angora cats, Skye terriers, setter dogs and dachshunds, an alligator from Florida, a guinea pig from Spain, Chinese idols, ivory carvings, ostrich eggs, shells, all sorts of marvels that always are of absorbing interest to children who visit my den; and at everything the elves gazed with much awe, for accustomed only to Conrad's humble home, they had never seen anything so wonderful.

The sea-spider made them shudder, of course, for he is perfectly hideous, and when I assured them that beyond giving a sharp pinch he was quite harmless, they looked very doubtful.

"I wouldn't like to get into his clutches!" said Aldrovandus, "for one good pinch would surely finish me."

"Well, this one is dead and well dried, so you needn't fear him," said I. "Next summer I will show you some live ones at the seashore."

"Well, we are very grateful," spoke Aldrovandus, when they had seen everything, "and I now invite you to come and see my home."

"It is a long way off," I responded, "but I hope to get time to visit you some day."

"I would like to make you a trifling gift, if you will accept it," added the old elf. With that he drew out a tiny purse and opened it, poured out upon the rug a number of gleaming pebbles. I looked at them with great interest, expecting him to say that they were magic charms, perhaps, for they did not seem to be anything extraordinary. Then he added:

"These are diamonds of the finest kind, found by me at various times in the underworld and preserved more out of curiosity than anything else, for we do not value them; but, if you have them cut into the shapes you humans admire, you will find them magnificent. I will be pleased to present them to you as a gift of friendship."

Then, you may be sure, I looked at the stones with different eyes, for they were as large as hazelnuts and I knew must be worth many thousands of dollars. I took them and thanked the elf with a feeling that I was getting much the better of the bargain, even if he didn't value diamonds as I did. Then I produced a bottle of wine, for I knew that elves are very fond of drinking, and invited them to sit down and partake of it with me. They were delighted, and as they clinked their glasses they sang an elfin song that still runs in my head.

Suddenly one of them spied a wrinkled, yellowish object lying on my worktable, and, as they had been examining everything, he pointed to it and asked what it was. I looked and replied:

"Oh, that's a foolish toy for children. It's made of rubber, and when you blow it up it looks like a funny baby."

"Now, I supposed everybody had seen those rubber things and I had no idea that it would frighten an elf, beside when I explained it I forgot to say that when it is squeezed it squeaks, having at the end a wooden whistle. I guess that's what it might be called. Therefore after I blew it up and held it out toward them I didn't calculate what an effect the queer, painted face on it would have."

Aldrovandus stared at it in horrified silence for a moment, and then cried:

"Oh, it's the Mantichora itself! Take it away!"

Then in order to show them what it was I squeezed it and it let out a loud squawk like a sick chicken!

That settled it! With one united yell of fear they fled. In a twinkling the elves had vanished through the doorway, and where they went I know not to this day. Time and time again have I tried to open up communication with them and explain that I did not mean to alarm them, but Conrad tells me that they will not trust a man who has such fearful creatures in his house!

Every time I look at that foolish rubber trifle on my desk I smile, and yet it is a weak and silly smile, for I instantly think what might have been my fortunate lot had I kept the elves my friends instead of scaring them half to death. Of course, I have the magnificent diamonds; but untold gold, also, might have been mine, tons of it, so that all my little friends would have been loaded with presents, all my poor relations been made rich, and I would never, never have to work again. And all lost because of a little rubber balloon thing!

They no doubt might have come to view the thing without fear after examining it, but that awful squeak was too much for them.

Since writing the above I have received a letter from Conrad telling me that Aldrovandus came to him and told him that he thought perhaps I was innocent of wishing to harm them, for he had seen a man selling the dreadful squawking things on the street, lots of them, in a basket, for ten cents each, and he guessed he would come up some night and tell me he was feeling like a big dumb-head!

Well, when he comes I will forgive him, and yet nothing less than a bushel of gold nuggets will make me feel the same toward him, and I shall tell him so the very first thing, too!

WALT McDOUGALL.